## Senate-House Conference Committee Provides $24.3 Million to Fix Flood-Damaged Roads in Southern California Forests

- Roads critical to efforts to fight fires in Southern California's bark beetle infested forests -

May 3, 2005

**Washington, DC** – The Supplemental Appropriations Committee Conference Report approved today by the Senate-House Conference Committee includes a provision sponsored by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) to provide $24.3 million in emergency funding to repair national forest roads and facilities in Southern California that were damaged by winter flooding.

**"This funding is critical to efforts to fight potentially catastrophic forest fires in the region's national forests,"** Senator Feinstein said. **"More than 90 percent of access roads in Southern California's national forests were washed away in this winter's floods, leaving 2.3 million acres inaccessible to ground-based fire crews. If there is a serious fire this summer, crews simply won't be able to reach vast tracts of land, and entire forests could go up in smoke. This funding is urgently needed to fix the roads, protect communities, and save lives."**

The version of the bill originally approved by the Senate had included $34.3 million for the forest roads, however, that figure was reduced along with a number of other reductions to earmarks by the Conference Committee.

Last winter, 70 to 90 inches of rain fell in Southern California forests, causing mudslides and flooding in the region's National Forests. According to the Forest Service, up to 90%-95% of the back roads through the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests have been washed away or covered by mudslides. These roads are crucial to fire suppression. Without repair, 2.3 million acres will be inaccessible to firefighters this summer.

Two years ago, intense fires burned 739,597 acres in these national forests, destroying 3631 homes and killing 24 people. Fuel loads may be worse this year because of grasses that have grown as a result of last winter's rains.